

UTTARA GONOBHABAN 5 PWD officials, contractor found responsible for felling trees

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

The committee, formed to investigate the felling of trees on Uttara Gonobhaban premises in Natore's Dighapatia, has held five Public Works Department (PWD) officials and a PWD enlisted contractor responsible for misappropriating government properties.

It submitted the probe report to Deputy Commissioner of Natore Shaheena Khatun yesterday, accusing three of them of cutting down a large number of trees illegally and the rest of aiding and abetting the trio.

After getting the report, the DC held a press briefing at her conference room.

Quoting the report, the DC said PWD Executive Engineer in Natore Mashur Rahman Akando, contractor Soheli Fayal and caretaker Abdus Sabur were directly involved in the cutting down of the trees, while PWD Sub-divisional Engineer Ziaur Rahman and Section Officer Md Kamruzzaman and another caretaker Abul Kashem were indirectly involved in the incident.

Both Sabur and Kashem have been assigned to look after the Uttara Gonobhaban.

The probe committee has found that contractor Soheli illegally felled a good number of trees, which is worth around Tk 3.63 lakh, said chief of the committee Razzaqul Islam, also additional district magistrate of Natore.

The report also mentions that Soheli cut down 17 alive trees and branches of 43 others illegally. He was permitted to fell three dead trees and branches of 14 others.

The local administration formed the committee following media reports about irregularities in cutting down the trees.

Razzaqul said Mashur put pressure on Ziaur and Kamruzzaman for completing the tender process for selling the dead trees hurriedly. Caretaker Sabur helped Mashur in this work.

Later, contractor Soheli in collusion with Mashur cut down the alive trees.

According to the probe report, both Mashur and Soheli benefited from the felling of additional trees.

Ziaur, Kamruzzaman and another caretaker Kashem were found to have been involved in the incident indirectly as they knew everything about it, but did not inform the higher authorities of the PWD, the probe committee chief added.

The committee also proposed a seven-point recommendation, including the filing of a case against the six.

The PWD looks after the maintenance of the Uttara Gonobhaban, and the Uttara Gonobhaban management committee, headed by the Natore DC, supervises overall activities of the Uttara Gonobhaban. Razzaqul said, adding that the PWD floated the tender without permission from the management committee.

Bomb-making stuffs seized at 'militant den'

UNB, Jessore

Police claimed to have recovered a huge quantity of bomb-making materials in a raid on an alleged militant den in Jessore town last night.

During the hour-long drive from around 9:00pm, the law enforcers recovered five litres of acid, 150 detonators, 25 packets of explosive gel and a large amount of grenade-making equipment from the house in Birampur Pagladah area, said Anisur Rahman, superintendent of police in the district.

He claimed a loaded pistol and three magazines were also found inside the militant hideout.

Earlier, police arrested the house owner Mozaffar Ahmed, imam of the old hostel mosque of Govt MM College in Old Kasba area of the town, and carried out the drive based on information gleaned from him, said ATM Ajmal Huda, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station.

However, Mozaffar's wife and two children who were inside the house were not arrested.

Earlier, police cordoned off the house around 7:30pm after being tipped off that militants were staying inside, the SP said.

Over 100 law enforcers, including members of Detective Branch (DB) of police, Special Weapons And Tactics (SWAT) and bomb disposal unit, took part in the drive, led by the superintendent of police.

Key suspect

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related to leaking question papers and helping those who cheat in exams.

The official said they learnt about the transaction after examining the electronic equipment seized from the three arrestees in the case.

Mamun is a third-year student of applied chemistry and chemical engineering and also the theatre and debate affairs secretary of the BCL's Amar Ekushey Hall unit. The other two arrestees are Mohiuddin Rana, a master's student of physics and also an assistant secretary of the BCL central committee; and admission seeker Ishrak Hossain Rafi.

Rana was expelled from the BCL after the incident on Friday.

The CID official also said key suspect Alip has an account with a mobile financial service provider. The account received a good amount of money ahead of the exams, the official said.

A former BCL leader of Dhaka College, Alip has been on the run since the incident surfaced. He currently works at the admin department of the Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protishtan (BKSP) in Savar, the official said, adding that they have already alerted the airports and land ports so that the suspect cannot flee the country.

"We will know more about the racket after Alip's arrest."

During primary interrogation, the arrestees said Alip was running the racket, which was involved in leaking question papers. Several students of DU, Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University and some of those involved with coaching centres were also a part of the gang, say the case statements.

Contacted, a BKSP official, wishing not to be named, yesterday told The Daily Star that Alip did not go to his office for the last two days.

BKSP Director General Brig Gen Shamsur Rahman said he came to know about the allegation against Alip through newspapers. Asked, he said no law enforcers contacted them looking for the suspect.

"Alip took a leave till Wednesday," he added.

Another CID official said they were trying to arrest the suspect and would ask the BKSP authorities to give them any information about him.

A special team of CID arrested the two BCL leaders from their dormitories hours before the admission tests on Friday. Rafi was caught red-handed while cheating in the exam using a special electronic device. The trio is currently on four-day remand each.

Talking to this newspaper at the CID headquarters in the city's Malibagh on Friday, Rana said he was working as a "middleman" for a syndicate run by Alip.

This year Rana was assisting two examinees. Last year he had two clients (students) for admission under 'Ka' unit. One of them got admitted to the university, and he received Tk 20,000 for the job.

Rafi said he entered into a Tk 4 lakh

contract with Zenith, a student of Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, and also a BCL activist, who had introduced him to Rana, according to the case statement.

Rana collected the device, used for cheating in the Friday's exam, from Alip's brother and handed it over to Rafi, said the statement.

The case statement also said the CID along with the three teachers and a house tutor of Amar Ekushey carried out a drive on Thursday night on information that a racket was involved in leaking question papers of DU's "Gha" unit exam. The two BCL leaders were arrested during the drive.

The statements also said the whatsapp messages found in Mamun's cell phone showed that images of question papers and admit cards of several admission seekers were sent to other users.

A CID official said they were still investigating the matter and were trying to find out whether the racket and the reported "Gha" unit question paper leak were linked.

Talking to this correspondent yesterday, Additional Special Superintendent Minhazul Islam of the CID said such groups were involved in leaking question papers of various public examinations like university admission tests or job exams.

PROTESTS CONTINUE

Like Sunday, left-leaning student organisations yesterday continued their protests on the DU campus, demanding postponement of the admissions under the "Gha" unit.

Pragatishel Chhatra Jote, an alliance of left leaning student organisations, made the demand at a press conference at the university's Madhur Canteen.

Bangladesh Chhatra Federation's DU unit also held a protest rally demanding cancellation of the exam and punishment for those involved with the question "leak".

Einstein's theory

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by hand in German, according to the seller, a relative of the messenger.

"Maybe if you're lucky those notes will become much more valuable than just a regular tip," Einstein told the messenger, according to the seller, a resident of the German city of Hamburg who wished to remain anonymous.

One note, on the stationary of the Imperial Hotel Tokyo, says that "a quiet and modest life brings more joy than a pursuit of success bound with constant unrest."

The other, on a blank piece of paper, simply reads: "where there's a will, there's a way."

It is impossible to determine if the notes were a reflection of Einstein's own musings on his growing fame, said Roni Grosz, the archivist in charge of the world's largest Einstein collection, at Jerusalem's Hebrew University.

Poor focus

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in terms of reducing under-five child mortality rate -- from 133 in 1990 to 46 per 1,000 live births.

Globally, 159 million children under five years are now stunted, which is a nine percent less than that in 2000.

"But, what happens to those surviving? What about their health?," said the top official of the Canada-based organisation operating globally.

There are many cheap innovations like Vitamin A, zinc and oral rehydration salts, iodized salt, iron folic acid that can fight many of the nutritional, diarrhoeal and anaemic problems, yet so many people of the world cannot get access to those.

"This is the question of allocation, efficiency and political will," Spicer said, adding that this is the era of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) bringing forth the issue of integration and inclusion. Achieving the goals is not possible, leaving those suffering from stunting, wasting and overweight.

He suggests working in a different approach. There is a good leadership at the national nutrition council, but the investment is really low.

"When you look into the investment to fight the problem, it has been flat lined. It hasn't gone up over the last few years," Spicer said.

NI Bangladesh Country Director Zaki Hassan said budgetary allocation for nutrition is less than one percent in Bangladesh.

"The damage being caused is not well understood and the money being spent to address the damage is absolutely mismatched to the damage. As each day goes by, this gap and damage are increasing," Spicer said.

Referring to a World Bank report, he said the children who escaped stunting were 33 percent less likely to live in poverty. Also, the adult wage rate for them can be increased to 5-50 percent.

Now in the fourth industrial revolution of the Internet of Things, labour markets require people with high skills.

Expressing worries over what would happen to hundreds of millions of young people who are facing a deficit of hope and opportunity, Spicer said this would likely create a less stable world.

"What happens when there is instability in a neighbouring country? It does not politely wait outside of your border," he warned.

Against this backdrop, NI is launching the Canadian \$3.2 million Right Start Initiative aimed at benefiting two million women of reproductive age and adolescent girls in Bangladesh by 2020.

NI would provide them with rice fortified with iron, folic acid and other micronutrients to prevent anaemia, Zaki Hassan said.

Besides, 592,000 pregnant women in 10 districts and two city corporations will receive better antenatal, delivery and postnatal care under the programme, he added.

Held hostage

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routes are broken and they are unable to reach the market easily."

The market's managing committee says many traders are facing losses due to the dams.

The dams have also created water logging problems for several nearby villages, with mosquitoes and water hyacinth thriving in the stagnant water.

"Before last year's monsoon we started dredging," explains the executive engineer for the Bangladesh Water Development Board in Manikganj, Hasan Mahmud. "A three-kilometre stretch from Bahadurpur Bazar to Kapilpara was dredged. The dams were built to facilitate this work. When dredging was completed our contractor tried on three occasions to remove the dams. He was prevented from doing so."

A number of influential people in the Bahadurpur and Ramkrishnapur areas led by some ruling party members oppose removal of the dams. They say they are motivated by a desire to protect the areas from Padma River erosion; many locals disagree.

"Erosion hasn't been a problem in this area for many years," says Soheli Rana, an assistant teacher at Gopinathpur Bhatipara Government Primary School. "It's not a reason to cut river communication."

"There is no logic behind the claim that the dams prevent erosion," agrees Abdul Kuddus, chairman of Gopinathpur union council. "Rather, the dams prevent shoal-dwellers from reaching our market."

Many locals allege that ruling party members including Gopinathpur Union Awami League president Abul Kalam Azad Mubi and general secretary Obaidur Rahman Biltu earned large profits from fish farming in the excavated three-kilometre river stretch. Locals also report that fishers were prevented from catching fish there.

When contacted, Abul Kalam admitted that local fishers were prevented from fishing that stretch of river last year, because of their fish farming project. But no fish were being cultivated there this year, he said.

"On several occasions I have requested that the dams be demolished, in monthly development coordination meetings with the upazila council," says Kuddus. "For reasons unknown no action has been taken."

Harirampur's upazila nirbahari officer Kazi Rezoane Arefin says he has asked the Bangladesh Water Development Board's executive engineer to remove the dams in response to the union council chairman's request.

Act quickly

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the Rohingyas in Myanmar.

"One has to ask, why is the plight of this Muslim minority group being ignored? Why has this systematic persecution been allowed to play out for so long?"

In her capacity as a board member of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and as an advocate of the work of UN humanitarian agencies, she toured the Kutupalong refugee camp. She met several Rohingya women and children, who recently crossed into Bangladesh from Myanmar's Rakhine.

Describing their stories, Queen Rania mentioned Rohingyas' accounts of children orphaned, women brutalized, family members butchered, and villages burned.

"Before coming here, I had braced myself to witness some desperate conditions, but the stories I heard today [yesterday] were heartbreaking and harrowing," she said.

She heard of systematic rape of young girls, who were trapped in schools and raped by soldiers. "I've heard of babies being kicked around like footballs and stomped on. I've heard family members telling me how they've seen their parents killed, right before their eyes."

"This is something that is unacceptable," Queen Rania said.

She visited emergency services offered by humanitarian agencies at the camp, stopping at a UNHCR-run healthcare centre as well as at a school that has been turned into a shelter to host hundreds of new arrivals, including unaccompanied children.

She then proceeded towards the surrounding makeshift settlements, which were recently set up to provide shelter to incoming refugees.

The Queen, also the first Eminent Advocate for Children of the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef), stopped by a child learning centre run by the agency, as well as a primary healthcare centre run by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

She stated that 95 percent of Rohingyas did not have access to safe water and more than three-quarters of

them lacked food.

Queen Rania's visit to Bangladesh coincides with a high level pledging conference taking place in Geneva on Monday, aiming to mobilise international resources for the Rohingya Crisis Response Plan.

The plan, which calls for \$434 million to help 1.2 million people through February 2018, is currently only 26 percent funded.

"This visit helps draw attention to the incredible generosity of the government and people of Bangladesh, and helps maintain support to the fastest-growing refugee emergency today," said Louise Aubin, UNHCR's senior emergency coordinator in Cox's Bazar.

Sohel Taj's bag

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not received any formal complaint and suggested that Soheli's suitcase was broken into at Dubai during transit.

He further added that the suitcase was likely to be broken into in the US if it did not have a lock approved by the Transportation Security Administration of the US.

Iqbalur stressed that airport officials in Dhaka follow the rules of International Civil Aviation Organisation, which states that luggage or suitcases should not be opened without the permission and presence of owner.

"We don't open any passenger's luggage unless there are explosives in it. Soheli Taj is a respected person of the country... We would never break his suitcase lock without his permission."

Soheli became state minister for home affairs after the Awami League came to power in 2009. But he resigned within six months following what he told his close aides was a row with a cousin of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Soheli left the country and started living in the US soon afterwards.

He also resigned as the MP in April 2012 and declared that he would no longer be actively involved in politics.

Catalan leaders

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"This assault will receive a response in the form of massive civil disobedience," the CUP, a key regional power broker, said in a statement.

Lluís Corominas, spokesman of the Together for Yes ruling coalition, meanwhile urged a "peaceful and democratic defence of Catalan institutions".

He branded the Spanish response to the independence drive "a case of unprecedented institutional violence".

PROTESTS, STRIKES

Catalan firefighters hinted they may offer resistance in the dispute by refusing to obey orders from national authorities.

"It depends on what they ask us to do. If there is a road that is blocked and they send us to unblock it, maybe we won't go," said a spokesman for a firefighter association associated to the separatist movement.

Teachers called a protest march for Thursday, and students said they will go on strike from that day.

Half a million angry separatists took to the streets of Barcelona on Saturday after Rajoy announced he would replace Puigdemont and his executive.

To do so, Madrid will use previously untested constitutional powers to stop Catalonia breaking away.

FORCEFUL TAKEOVER?

Under Article 155 of the 1978 Spanish constitution, Madrid could take control of the Catalan police force and replace the heads of its public broadcaster.

Political analysts warn that Madrid faces a serious struggle in practical terms to impose control over the region, especially if civil servants refuse to obey orders from central authorities.

Xavier Arbos Marin, a constitutional law professor at the University of Barcelona, raised the prospect of the government trying to "take them out by force".

Until now, Catalonia controlled its own policing, education and healthcare, but discontent has grown in recent years of economic crisis. Separatists are demanding greater control for the region over its finances.

The region of 7.5 million people is

Khaleda

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committee members about her meeting with Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj. She termed the meeting "satisfactory", according to the sources.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir will brief the media about the committee meeting's outcome at a press conference at 11:00am today at the party's Nayapalton headquarters.

protective of its culture, language and autonomy, though polls indicate its inhabitants are divided on whether to break away from Spain.

Puigdemont says 90 percent of those who voted in the referendum backed a split from Spain, but turnout was estimated at 43 percent.

Anti-independence Catalans, who argue the region is stronger as part of a united Spain, stayed away.

BREXIT, ITALY REFERENDA

The Senate is set to approve the final course of action by the end of the week.

Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's conservative Popular Party holds a majority in the upper house.

Under the constitutional procedure, elections for a new Catalan parliament must be held within six months. A newspaper poll suggested that secessionist parties may jointly win a majority once again.

There is debate among experts over whether the government's actions are even legal, however, the law expert Arbos Marin said.

The crisis has rattled a European Union already grappling with Brexit.

Two of Italy's wealthiest northern regions, Veneto and Lombardy, voted overwhelmingly in favour of greater autonomy in non-binding referendum on Sunday.

Organisers said they were seeking greater autonomy and to reduce their regions' tax contributions to Rome rather than looking to secede.

Dhaka wants

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Finance Minister AMA Muhith, who was present there, asked whether rice import from Myanmar was a right thing to do when the neighbouring country was committing atrocities against the Rohingyas and driving them out, said the sources.

In response, Hasina said the Rohingya crisis is part of a conspiracy against the country and its economy, and there were provocations so that Dhaka acts negatively over the issue.

But the government did not walk into the trap, she said, adding that had the country been locked in disputes with Myanmar, it would not have got international support.

The PM said her government wants good relations with all countries and that the economic relations with neighbours would continue in any circumstances. Any bilateral problems would be resolved through discussion and diplomatic means.

Hasina added that a Myanmar minister came to Dhaka for discussion and one of her cabinet ministers is visiting Myanmar to discuss how the Rohingyas can be repatriated.

Through hectic diplomatic efforts, Bangladesh has been able to convince the international community to pressurise Myanmar over the issue, she noted.

Hasina referred to economic relations between India and Pakistan even after war-like situations, said the sources.